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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 001950

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR VDEPIRRO, WSMITH, BPREMONT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2013

TAGS: PGOV KCOR PREL KJUS SNAR DR

SUBJECT: DR POLITICS - EX-PRSC STAR GUIDING FEW, FOR NOW

REF: A. SDO 1921

1B. SDO 1513

1C. SDO 1296

11. (C) Summary: Eduardo Estrella, a former presidential candidate of the PRSC (Partido Reformista Social Cristiano) offered Poloff a worrying assessment of the DR's political and economic scene much like other politicians and officials have done: Corruption is reaching self-destructive proportions and a dissatisfied but fearful populace may one day reach for a "Venezuelan" solution (ref A). Estrella, once considered one of President Balaguer's best Secretaries of Public Works, now toils in spare offices in the basement of a Santo Domingo mall - circumstances emblematic, perhaps, of his quixotic fight against corruption. Whether his tiny "Movement of Dominicans for Change" will be able to tap into, and constructively channel, Dominicans' latent anger has yet to be seen. Creation of a broad-based, honest and responsible opposition may be required before his efforts matter much and a social explosion is averted. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On 12/16, Poloff met with Eduardo Estrella, a Reformist Party (PRSC) presidential candidate in 2004, who sought party's nomination in 2007 - campaigning on an anti-corruption platform - but who lost out to Amable Aristy. Upon being denied the PRSC's nomination, Estrella left and Aristy led the party to a crushing defeat in the presidential elections of May 2008. Since then, Estrella has formed the "Movement of Dominicans for Change" which he is trying to register as a political party. As of now, it is unclear time whether his party will be registered and ready in time for congressional elections planned for 2010.

13. (C) Surveying the political scene, Estrella began by criticizing the Joint Electoral Commission (JCE) with which he must, if possible, register his party. He indicated that although he has begun the lengthy process of collecting the 80,000 signatures necessary to register, he believes that a group of just five JCE judges really controls decision-making. He implied that they will not look favorably on his efforts to generate a new party. He then discussed the "great dissatisfaction" of the Dominican people with the current situation, particularly levels of corruption that are choking the ability of people to follow through with business initiatives. "OK, in Balaguer's time," he said indignantly, "Somebody might get 10 percent (as a bribe or kickback), but today from what I understand, it must be 30 percent." (Note: It is striking that this same point was made by the man currently serving as PRSC Secretary General, ref B. End Note)

14. (SBU) Saying he is a true friend of the United States, Estrella next critiqued us for "inconsistency" when applying pressure on the DR to uphold standards. Pointing the perception that we had revoked and then reinstated Amable Aristy's U.S. visa several years ago, he said, "That left a

bitter taste in our mouths." (Note: Clearly, Estrella is bitter about having lost the nomination to Aristy. That said, a corrupt Senator - clearly resembling Aristy in physical appearance - was portrayed in the recent Dominican movie "Ladrones a Domicilio" - "Robbers for Home Delivery." Poloff attended one showing during which the Dominican audience laughed openly when, at the end of the film, a standard disclaimer appeared stating that the movie's characters are fictional and that any resemblance is purely coincidental. End Note.) Estrella added that - although a nationalist of the Balaguer type - he wanted us to find ways of weighing in more. For instance, he pointed to the Ambassador's hard-hitting Thanksgiving speech about the need to strengthen the rule of law and disagreed that it constituted unacceptable "interference" as Senate President Reinaldo Pared Perez had recently claimed.

¶15. (C) Estrella is resigned to continue a lonely struggle against the "all for me" mentality he sees in current Dominican politics, law enforcement, and society. He acknowledged that a few people, like Supreme Court President Subero Isa, are trying, but "what can they do against so many?" Worse, Estrella is convinced that many leaders - including President Fernandez - are smart enough to know that the DR risks falling further behind due to underinvestment in people, failure to address energy issues and rising crime, "but they just don't care because they are making money."

¶16. (C) Comment: Once again a Dominican contact has evinced a profound, if pessimistic, understanding of the challenges facing the country (ref C). What is missing is some mechanism whereby sincere Dominicans could overcome fear and disunity to push back against real or imagined malignant

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personalities. It may fall to Embassy Santo Domingo to consider developing a strategy - Estrella suggested a series of roundtable discussions - to weave together relatively honest and distressed Dominican leaders into an effective counter-force. End Comment.

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